

Civil War Issues in Pennsylvania: A Review Essay

“THIS BOOK’S MAJOR THEME,” announced William Dusinger in the introduction to *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia, 1856–1865*, is “the pervasive influence in an important Northern city of the same anti-Negro views which so deeply affected the South.”¹ With that statement modern historical writing on the Civil War in Pennsylvania began.

The following is an assessment of historical interpretations of Pennsylvania’s Civil War in modern literature on the subject. Readers should not expect to see the results of archival discovery or of research in original sources in this article. Nor is this meant to be a bibliography. It is, rather, an appraisal of the problems of interpreting Pennsylvania’s role in the Civil War and of the solutions to the problems offered by modern historical writing on the subject. The military contribution of Pennsylvania to the Civil War is likewise beyond our reach here. The bibliography on the Battle of Gettysburg alone would swamp this little article. The focus will be decidedly on the home front—on politics, society, and the economy.

Dusinger’s book was published in 1965, not long after the appearance of Leon F. Litwack’s groundbreaking work, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860*. Litwack awakened historians to the problem of racism in the North before the Civil War and thus greatly complicated the historical problem of the causes of the war.² Earlier, historians had assumed that a steadily growing antislavery movement in the North eventually provoked the sectional crisis that degenerated into war in 1861. Litwack’s dramatic documentation of race prejudice in the northern states presented historians with this paradox: antislavery sentiment was rising in antebellum times while the opinion of the African American was falling. That was not a just a paradox; it was an impossi-

¹ William Dusinger, *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia, 1856–1865* (Philadelphia, 1965), 16. The title of this essay is adapted from this seminal book.

² Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago, 1961).

bility. The creation of the Republican Party, an essential prerequisite in any account of the origins of the Civil War, now became vexingly difficult to explain. It had to be explained as something other than a growing anti-slavery party.³

This reality was a problem for Civil War historiography in general, but it presented as acute a problem in explaining Pennsylvania's role in the war as for any other state in the North. Taken together, Litwack's references to Pennsylvania left historians of the state with an unforgettable image: Antislavery got its start in Pennsylvania mainly from the ideas behind the American Revolution combined with the unusual Quaker heritage of the state. These forces led to the passage of a law in 1780 to abolish slavery in the state.⁴ But as Litwack's evidence demonstrated, it was not all smooth sailing for abolitionists or free African Americans in Pennsylvania afterward, as documented by the petitions submitted to the state legislature seeking the prohibition of further immigration by African Americans into the state. A movement to amend the state constitution to prevent such immigration failed at the constitutional convention of 1837–38.⁵ However, the convention also considered explicitly excluding African Americans from the franchise.

While the constitutional convention was deliberating, the state supreme court ruled that a 1795 law had already excluded Africans Americans from the franchise. The aggressive role played by the judiciary in the movement to restrict the vote by race is striking. The court faced the problem that the original reasoning and decision had been lost, but, as Litwack put it, the chief justice “declared that the memory of a good friend and Philadelphia lawyer was ‘perfect and entitled to full confidence’” in this matter—a remarkable citation of precedent. Then, after a contested election in Bucks County, Judge John Fox ruled that the votes of African Americans, apparently decisive in the contest, were illegal. Here is Litwack's description of the decision:

The framers of the state constitution, he [Judge Fox] declared, “were a political community of white men exclusively,” and Negroes were not even contemplated by that document, for they were then, as now, a degraded and inferior race. “What white man,” Judge Fox asked, “would not feel himself insulted by a serious imputation that he was a negro, and who,

³ Historian Michael F. Holt taught me the significance of this great problem in the late 1960s.

⁴ Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 3, 7, 12–13, 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

having believed himself to be of the white race, if he should be found to be strongly tainted with black blood, would not feel and experience that he had fallen greatly in the social scale?" Judge Fox claimed, moreover, that Negroes had never voted in the city or county of Philadelphia, where most of them lived, or in the greater portion of the state.⁶

The state judiciary, which here foreshadowed the infamous Dred Scott decision of 1857, would weigh in again aggressively on important issues in the Civil War.

Litwack's narrative made patterns of deep social discrimination readily apparent as well. Segregation was the order of the day. African Americans were not excluded from the legislation establishing public schools in Pennsylvania, but in any district with twenty or more black students, they were to be grouped in separate facilities. Occupational choices for African Americans were limited.⁷ Any honest graph charting the status of African Americans in Pennsylvania in the nineteenth century would run decidedly downward from the 1780 emancipation law until the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863.

Dusinberre's *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia* made for startling reading, quite out of the ordinary for books on Civil War subjects at the time, for it was among the first to attempt to deal with the effects historians' discovery of racism in the North would have on the study of the Civil War. Dusinberre chose Philadelphia because it was "the country's second largest metropolis [with a population of about 570,000 in 1860], a far more important city than in later years, and its location in the 'Middle States' gave it a political atmosphere probably similar to that in the large area extending from New York City and much of New Jersey, through southern Pennsylvania, to the southern parts of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois."⁸ With devastating quotations from newspapers and from political oratory, Dusinberre documented the way the politicians of the era catered to an electorate characterized by racist views like those described by Litwack. For example, William D. Kelley, "the best-known Republican spokesman" in 1856, denounced Preston Brooks, the South Carolina congressman who had recently caned Charles Sumner on the floor of the United States Senate, because he "regards negro slavery as the only element in this contest. Think of it, my fellow-citizens, you who earn your

⁶ Ibid., 85–86.

⁷ Ibid., 114, 154–55.

⁸ Dusinberre, *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia*, 11.

bread by the sweat of your brow; think of it, sons of mechanics, laboring men, niggerism is the only element in this contest, says Mr. Brooks! But there is another party in the contest—white laboring men—the Anglo-Saxon, and the whole Caucasian race—working with its own hands. Do you believe the colored race a superior race to that to which we belong? No, you do not.”⁹ By examining such language, Dusinberre argued that the Republicans stirred “antipathy to Southern political leaders” rather than displaying “friendliness to Negroes.”¹⁰

In the year Kelley was speaking the Republican candidate for mayor, William Thomas, garnered less than 1 percent of the vote in the city.¹¹ The election occurred too early in the year to register the effects of the caning of Sumner and violence in Kansas, and there was much ground to cover before the party became politically viable. Meanwhile many in Philadelphia who opposed the Democratic Party joined the anti-Catholic American (Know-Nothing) Party—a further sign of lack of commitment to antislavery policies on the part of Philadelphians.

Dusinberre concluded his treatment of the war itself with these words, “We end, as we began, on a sour racist note.”¹² He described the sharp divisions over racial issues between the parties during the war, but he depicted the Democrats as aggressively anti-African American and the Republicans as a party “moved mainly by the military needs of the North” to adopt emancipation and enlistment of African American soldiers.¹³

Dusinberre’s was a brief book, based substantially on shrewd analysis of evidence from the newspapers. The most thorough consideration of the problem for historians of how to explain the rise of Civil War issues in a climate of prevailing racism in Pennsylvania (and the North in general) came in 1969 from political historian Michael F. Holt in *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848–1860*. Holt was an early apostle of what came to be called the New Political History, and his approach to the problem differed markedly from Dusinberre’s, though both had been students of the influential and original Civil War historian David Herbert Donald. Holt adopted the methods and tone of the political scientist. He relied primarily on statistical analysis of voting for his most telling evidence, and his work was not

⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰ Ibid., 34–35.

¹¹ Ibid., 33.

¹² Ibid., 177.

¹³ Ibid., 178.

characterized by lengthy and impressionistic descriptions establishing the “sour racist note” left by the middle of the nineteenth century in America. This would continue to characterize the tone of his writing on the period. When, almost a decade later, he introduced yet another brilliant book on *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, while rejecting his earlier “purely behavioral model,” he stated that his concern was “more with the impact of the party system on leadership decisions than with the morality of particular decisions themselves.”¹⁴ Still, Dusinger and Holt were dealing with the same bedrock problem for political historians of the causes of the Civil War: the striking degree to which politicians of the period showed “a respect for the anti-Negro prejudices of many of the people.”¹⁵

Holt chose Pittsburgh for study in part because “it gave Lincoln a larger percentage of the vote in 1860 than any other major city in the country” and in part also because a statistical study could be managed for a city with a population under fifty thousand in 1860 (Holt’s study preceded the ready use of calculators and computers).¹⁶ Acknowledging the influence of Dusinger, Holt explained early in his book,

In Pennsylvania . . . the Republicans did not make slavery or even its extension their primary target. As William Dusinger’s study of Philadelphia in this period also shows, Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh Republicans apparently cared more for the rights of white men than of Negroes. They complained less about slavery in Kansas than about the attempt to force it on Northern settlers against their will. Republican appeals were aimed at the unfair power of the minority South, and its aggressions against the rights of the Northern majority, rather than at slavery. Republican rhetoric in Pittsburgh opposed slavery expansion primarily to hurt the South and preserve the territories for white men, not to help the Negro. Indeed, one reason Republicans played down their anti-slavery appeal and spoke instead of white men’s rights was a respect for the anti-Negro prejudices of many of the people in the city.

Moreover, other issues than the sectional ones revolving around slavery provided prime motivation for voters in Pittsburgh in the 1850s. “Divisions between native-born Americans and immigrants and between Protestants and Catholics, rather than differences of opinion about the

¹⁴ Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (1978; New York, 1983), vii, ix.

¹⁵ Michael F. Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848–1860* (New Haven, CT, 1969), 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

tariff or the morality of slavery, distinguished Whigs and Republicans from Democrats,” he argued.¹⁷ Emphasis on the role of the Know-Nothings was greater in Holt’s work than in Dusinger’s, and Holt at one point stated that the “Republican party in 1856 was just as much a vehicle for anti-Catholic sentiment as it was for antislavery sentiment.”¹⁸ Holt’s narrative is vivified, for example, by the appearance of Joe Barker, a candidate for mayor in Pittsburgh in 1850. Barker was a street preacher, one of a number of charismatic unschooled common men who hated Catholics and spread the word against them on the corners of city streets from Pittsburgh to New York City. Barker, running as a “People’s and Anti-Catholic Candidate,” surprisingly won the election, though he was in jail at the time for inciting a riot.¹⁹

Holt, though a champion of the ethnocultural interpretation of voting and a critic of economic determinist models of voting behavior, nevertheless paid serious attention to the economy of the 1850s. In 1857 the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Ohio and Pennsylvania Railroad linked up in Pittsburgh, but the consequences were hardly what the city fathers who had promoted the development envisioned. According to Holt, the through line to the great West eliminated need for the transshipment services in the city, and completion of the line saw the railroads charge high short-haul rates in comparison to the low long-haul rates through Pittsburgh. The Pennsylvania Railroad, as Holt explained it, was “one of the largest corporations ever to exist in the United States.” Moreover, other local rail projects failed financially in 1857. These factors made it easy to recall old Jacksonian resentments against large and rich corporations, and Pittsburgh’s Democrats could attempt to avoid national sectional issues associated with the administration of President James Buchanan by campaigning against railroad corporations and taxes to aid them.²⁰ Republicans contained the problem, and the excitement proved only temporary, but it revealed the possibilities that lay in such economic issues and would become salient in American politics years after the Civil War.

Although he essentially endorsed Holt’s interpretation of the politics of the 1850s, the economic historian James Huston revealed more about

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 174n.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 228–30.

the state's antebellum economy in an article that appeared in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* in 1989.²¹ Huston did not confine his study to the example of Pittsburgh, and he offered a valuable picture of the impact of the railroads on the state's economy, rural and urban alike. Essentially, the completion of through trunk lines from the efficient farms of the West to the eastern markets caused wheat production to fall in Pennsylvania in the years immediately preceding the Civil War, to be replaced by livestock and dairy operations.²² The number of workers involved in agricultural occupations fell with the advent of commercial agriculture, but the industries to which the workers moved were not organized on the factory system and instead used "familiar" methods.²³ Overall the dynamism of the antebellum economy in the state made adjustment to a market economy, more than social class or wealth, the key economic factor for workers (who were also voters).²⁴ The old verities of economic interpretations of the Civil War of the bygone days dominated by the categories of Charles Beard now vanished. Whatever else the modern historians tell us about the Pennsylvania economy on the eve of the Civil War, they argue that bewilderment and anxiety were prevalent, not a self-confident assertion of an industrialized North against an agrarian South.²⁵

Pennsylvania's political and economic history in the antebellum period revealed the true nature of the Republican Party, which formed in the mid-1850s in a climate of pervasive racism in the North. It opposed only the expansion of slavery and stressed the violence and tyrannical disposition of the slaveholders in the South and their seeming indifference to the traditional rights of white Northerners to settle in the territories or to criticize the South. Without focusing—as Harriet Beecher Stowe had done in her gendered critique of slavery—on the plight of slaves, the separation of families, and the frustration of slave religion, the party had to rely on voters as motivated by anti-Catholicism as they were by sectional

²¹ James L. Huston, "Economic Change and Political Realignment in Antebellum Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 113 (1989): 347–95.

²² *Ibid.*, 355–59.

²³ *Ibid.*, 350.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, esp. 393.

²⁵ Thus Huston's point is that Know-Nothings were poorly adjusted to the advent of the market, unlike the Republicans, but both wound up under the same party tent by the time of the war. See *Ibid.*, 370–72. On "anxieties and frustrations" see also Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," in his *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1992), 283–90.

issues. That was partly because only men could vote and hold office, and their critique of slavery tended to focus on political rights, power, and economics, but it was also because of the racism of the white electorate. With an amalgam of voters, the Republicans won 56.25 percent of the vote in Pennsylvania in 1860.²⁶

To write about Pennsylvania in the Civil War era without dealing with James Buchanan would be akin to writing about Illinois in the Civil War era without dealing with Abraham Lincoln. Buchanan was the only president of the United States to come from Pennsylvania and was therefore the most successful product of the state's politics. Indeed, it is the contrast between his solid service to Pennsylvania and the nation and his dismal performance as president that posed the problem in Jean Harvey Baker's *James Buchanan*. In this brief biography, published in 2004 in the American Presidents series edited by the Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Baker concluded that "Buchanan came closer to committing treason than any other president in American history."²⁷

Buchanan was a pessimist and a lonely bachelor, but, Baker argued, contrary to what is often said about his timid behavior in the secession crisis at the end of his presidential term, he had a Jacksonian view of the president's powers. Buchanan believed in an aggressively expansionist foreign policy and proved willing to send the United States army into Utah against the Mormons, in one of the three great crises that ruined his presidency. In another, the struggle over "Bleeding Kansas," he wielded the patronage power of the president as forcefully as any Democrat in the mold of Andrew Jackson. But in the secession crisis, the third and most overwhelming crisis, he seemed paralyzed. Baker concluded:

The question remains why Buchanan, a Pennsylvanian educated in a free state whose wealth came from the practices of capitalism, not plantations, was so pro-southern. The answer goes beyond the political support the South extended to him in the election of 1856. Rather, it rests in his social and cultural identification with what he perceived as the southern values of leisure, the gentleman's code of honor, and what George Cary Eggleston, a Virginia writer, once called "a soft dreamy deliciously quiet life . . . with all its sharp corners removed." Throughout his life Buchanan enjoyed the company of southerners. Their grace and courtesy, even their conversational talents, attracted him. With slavery unimportant [to

²⁶ *The Tribune Almanac and Political Register for 1865* (New York, 1865), 54.

²⁷ Jean H. Baker, *James Buchanan* (New York, 2004), 142.

him]—indeed Buchanan became convinced that slavery helped “civilize” blacks—he sought out the company of these white aristocrats and soon absorbed their ideals. He believed that southern legislators were often statesmen, protecting that icon of his faith—the U.S. Constitution.²⁸

Like Roger B. Taney, the chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, Buchanan had no direct ties with slavery at the time, but utilized extreme interpretations of the powers of his respective branch of the government to protect slavery in 1857 and 1858. When the secession crisis came in 1860–61, Buchanan, again apparently in deference to slaveholders, refused to use or create arguments for the presidential powers he had so willingly exerted earlier.

* * *

Given the bedrock racism of the Northern electorate on the eve of the war, perhaps it is little wonder that the historian who most ably chronicled the history of Philadelphia during the Civil War gave the Emancipation Proclamation only incidental mention in a 350-page book. In a brief statement on the subject in *Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia during the Civil War*, Matthew Gallman said that “Lincoln’s January 1, 1863, Emancipation Proclamation fueled anti-administration feeling in Philadelphia.”²⁹ In that respect Gallman still labored in the shadow of Dusinger’s pioneering work. Dusinger offered this description of the proclamation’s chilly reception even among Republicans in the city:

Although the emancipation policy was now backed by all the prestige of a wartime President, the reaction of most Peoples Party [Republicans in Pennsylvania insisted on keeping their distance from the reputation of the Republicans for radicalism and called themselves still the People’s Party] Philadelphians seems to have been extremely subdued. However much it might appeal to sentiments about freedom, the policy so abruptly ended the system of suppressing Negroes without which, many whites had assumed, anarchic racial conflicts would convulse the South—and it so completely contradicted what most Philadelphians had until recently supposed the government had any authority to do—that most Peoples Party

²⁸ Ibid., 137–38.

²⁹ J. Matthew Gallman, *Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia during the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1990), 182.

editors could justify it only as a way of striking blindly against the enemy. Practically all Democratic leaders arrayed themselves indignantly against what they regarded as a perversion of a justifiable if unnecessary war into a mad crusade against the most cherished traditions of the white race. Traditionally allied with Southern Democrats, and expecting to resume the alliance when the South returned to the Union, Democratic leaders naturally tended to cling to their allies' ideals. The different reactions of non-Democrats and Democrats to emancipation, in other words, had their roots not so much in their attitudes toward Negroes as in their attitudes toward Southern whites.³⁰

In the end, Gallman left many political issues to Dusinger's previous work, including his predecessor's extremely gloomy rendering of the issue of emancipation in the city.³¹ Gallman was more interested in the social history of Philadelphia in the Civil War.

The development of Philadelphia's economy—as well as other developments cultural and material—was richly described and brilliantly analyzed by Gallman. In fact, *Mastering Wartime* is perhaps the best single work written about the Northern home front and should by itself make Pennsylvania the envy of historians of the period in other states. The work is complex and comprehensive in its coverage, but it makes a simple point: continuity rather than discontinuity is the remarkable feature of the history of the war in Philadelphia. In other words, business, politics, and social life adjusted to the demands of war without revolutionary or dramatic change. Philadelphians, as he expressed it, “were able to maintain their peacetime routines while meeting the requirements of a major conflict.”³² As for the old historical problem of the relationship between the Civil War and the rise of the industrial economy, Gallman, greatly aided by statistics compiled by the city's Edwin T. Freedley in 1866 for his book *Philadelphia and Its Manufactures* (which helped fill the gap between the census years 1860 and 1870), concluded that the trends in manufacturing in the city were substantially uninterrupted. The war did not have a greatly stimulating impact on manufacturing.³³

Gallman's book goes a long way toward proving that the Civil War was not a “total war,” a paradigm of interpretation of the Civil War period that rose to dominance in historical writing in the long shadow of World War

³⁰ Dusinger, *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia*, 146–47.

³¹ Gallman, *Mastering Wartime*, 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 9.

³³ *Ibid.*, 255, 264–65.

II. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers several overlapping definitions of the term. One is that in such a war “Every citizen is in a sense a combatant and also the object of attack.” Another describes it as “a war to which all resources and the whole population are committed; loosely, a war conducted without any scruple or limitations.”³⁴ The Civil War was not a total war that entirely absorbed the resources and energies of America’s second largest city; neither Philadelphia nor any other Northern city had an experience that matched such definitions. The war did not lead to political centralization. It did not lead to much government coercion or scientific advancement or to changing, let alone, hardening of attitudes.

One of the surprising features of *Mastering Wartime*, despite its many charts and statistics, is Gallman’s broad and anecdotal view of social history. Gallman was interested in the traditional social questions. He gave answers to these traditional questions: for example, he concluded that no new class of war profiteers was created and laborers negotiated wages as before, at a disadvantage to owners and management.

But for Gallman, people’s experience in wartime Philadelphia was also a matter of “mourning” and “responses to separation,” of private benevolence and public rituals—subjects ingeniously and sympathetically explored in the book. According to Gallman, the war did not cause people to doubt their religion or find it an inadequate consolation for wartime loss. Take issues of separation and death, for example. Some eighty thousand to one hundred thousand Philadelphians served in the war, and among those some ten thousand died from wounds or disease. Yet death had never been a stranger even to the young cohort of nineteenth-century men who served, and the death rate likely exceeded the normal peacetime rate for the age only by about three times. Religion and family consolation sufficed both before and during the war. As for separation, the United States had always been a geographically mobile society, and a transition to some sort of independence away from home had long been regarded as a traditional rite of passage. Besides, the improved military mail service did much to keep people in touch with one another.³⁵

The war did not make philanthropy or local government seem quaint and outdated. The government did not have to create propaganda agencies, and the Fourth of July remained the same mix of patriotic oratory

³⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 18:286–87.

³⁵ See Gallman, *Mastering Wartime*, esp. 11, 54, 55–57, 60, 79, 83.

and good firecracker fun. All these points and more can be gleaned from Gallman's comprehensive coverage of Philadelphia history during the Civil War. Such a quick survey of the entirely manageable consequences the immense war had for Philadelphia hardly does justice to the richness of detail, varieties of evidence, and ingeniousness of proofs devised by Gallman to form his picture of the Civil War city. Perhaps one example will suffice to make the point: In employing the records of R. G. Dun, the credit-rating forerunner of Dun and Bradstreet, to construct both statistical tables and individual portraits of Philadelphia business firms that rose or fell with the disruptions of the war, Gallman even included the details of a company that successfully turned ploughshares into swords:

Samuel Sheble and John M. Fisher ran the Fair Mount Fork Works before the war, but in mid-1861 they began manufacturing bayonets and cavalry sabres. This transition required a substantial investment that, the credit reporter noted, had "a tendency to cramp them a little." But soon the partners began making a healthy profit on their government contracts.³⁶

Gallman described only Philadelphia, but his book touches on most of the major themes in the study of the Civil War home front everywhere, including the experiences of women and of African Americans. "As Northern men flocked to fill volunteer regiments or to man Home Guard companies, the women left behind dominated the war-related voluntary societies," Gallman pointed out.³⁷ There were more women in more organizations, but the structures of organization (and belief) remained substantially unchanged: the women generally worked under a male board of directors.³⁸ Much of the work was done in church organizations, or began there. Most important, the organizations spread and grew, but they did not notably centralize.³⁹ The lives of Philadelphia's twenty-two thousand African Americans are discussed at greatest length in Gallman's description of their struggle for acceptance in military service. A whole company of Philadelphians served in Massachusetts's Fifty-Fourth Regiment, and Gallman characterizes the experience as typical of the North, certainly not in advance of public opinion but not notably behind it either.⁴⁰

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 317–18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 48–49.

The wartime experience of women in Pennsylvania in general is described through looking at the familiar agencies of Gallman's work but in somewhat more revolutionary light in an article written by Rachel Filene Seidman, "We Were Enlisted for the War': Ladies' Aid Societies and the Politics of Women's Work during the Civil War." She described the work of the aid societies as protopolitical. True, the pattern of voluntary benevolence for the most part followed antebellum practice, but the link to an urgent national cause "gave women a new sense of direct participation in the nation's work," she argued.⁴¹

Identification with the nation—patriotism and nationalism—is central to the interpretation of the role of Pennsylvanians in the Civil War. The most direct and revealing treatment of nationalism in the North during the war is Melinda Lawson's *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North*, but this brilliant book only draws on Pennsylvania for some key examples. We can learn from those, however. Lawson identifies different models or styles of nationalism. One, the most conventional and familiar, is the model of self-sacrifice for the good of the nation, a form of nationalism embodied in the great fund-raising efforts for the United States Sanitary Commission. The commission, privately run but with government sanction, focused its efforts on raising medical supplies for the soldiers and sailors. The most spectacular of these efforts were the "sanitary fairs" organized mainly by women as gigantic charity bazaars, roughly on the scale of later state fairs, and the most spectacular of the fairs was the Great Central Fair held in Philadelphia. (Dusinberre, who focused on politics more than society and culture in Philadelphia, did not mention the energetically patriotic sanitary fair.) The fair, aptly named, combined the entertainment of a festival with the patriotic and charitable purpose of raising money for medical supplies for the war.

The Philadelphia fair, like others, was primarily "the project of . . . upper-class women" and, for all its fun, was based on the idea "that at its heart, membership in a nation meant a willingness to sacrifice."⁴² Along the way, the innovative and creative women showed that this new nation in fact had a venerable past, and

⁴¹ Rachel Filene Seidman, "We Were Enlisted for the War': Ladies' Aid Societies and the Politics of Women's Work during the Civil War," in *Pennsylvania's Civil War*, ed. William Blair and William Pencak (University Park, PA, 2001), 62.

⁴² Melinda Lawson, *Patriotic Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence, KS, 2002), 21, 29.

The most original contribution of the Sanitary Fairs to the material culture of the nation was the period room: collections of the furniture, paintings, knickknacks, and clothing of a particular time, brought together for display in a room designed solely for their viewing. Philadelphia offered a Pennsylvania kitchen and a William Penn parlor, Baltimore and Brooklyn displayed New England kitchens, Poughkeepsie created an Old Dutchess County room, New York boasted a Knickerbocker kitchen, and the Chicago fair offered a New England farmhouse.⁴³

Such exhibits “drew on existing values and beliefs. Utilizing such long-standing cultural forms as localism, domestic feminism, and Christian charity, they incorporated and at times transcended these notions, molding them into new understandings of identity and duty. At the heart of these new understandings lay a sense of the nation as a source of cultural pride and patriotism as Christian sacrifice.”⁴⁴

Philadelphia offered another wholly original model of patriotism as well, Lawson argues: the war-bond drive. In this model the idea was not old-fashioned Christian self-sacrifice but progressive investment in the nation’s future. Lending one’s money to the national government for the war would bring profit—in this “classical liberal understanding of patriotism.” The nation offered gain and not loss. A whole chapter of her book on nationalism thus focuses on the innovative work of Philadelphia financier Jay Cooke. In an era when few Americans owned any product traded on Wall Street, Cooke had the novel idea of selling the nation’s war bonds—in an exclusive deal that made his trading house the broker for the Treasury Department’s debt—to middle-class people. To get them to enter the market Cooke advertised in local newspapers, and he promoted the idea of gain instead of national ideals or patriotic sacrifice or “duty” or “civic virtue.”⁴⁵ He sold bonds in smaller denominations and offered night hours for people who had to work in the day. Perhaps the war was winnable without Cooke’s financial innovations, but this much can be said: Many in the Confederacy counted on an internal collapse of their Union foe through the timidity and selfishness of capital. Cooke almost singlehandedly defied that Southern strategy.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37–38.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 41, 43, 47, 51, 52, 54.

Judith Giesberg chooses to call the nationalism embodied in the Northern cause “free labor nationalism.” Her book, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front*, draws heavily on Pennsylvania history to make the case that historians’ assessments of the war’s impact on Northerners at home has been skewed by thinking about it in terms supplied by an ideal of free labor nationalism. To be sure, she says, one can say the Northern economy performed well during the war, but only on the model of “free labor nationalism.” That model, embodying northern capitalism as the ideal organization of labor (rather than the alternative model of slavery), held no particular place for women, especially poor or African American women, except on the sidelines supporting the war effort.⁴⁶

Arguing that modern literature focusing on the roles of women in the war featured predominantly middle-class women, Giesberg noted the differences in depictions and memorializations of women in the Confederacy and in the North. Women of the South have been put front and center in historical writing as one of the principal factors undermining morale. They weakened the Confederate war effort by placing demands on the state (for relief) and on their husbands and sons in service (to come home). Northern women—middle-class, to be sure—seem to have been even “naively” patriotic, she argued.⁴⁷

One of the problems with existing literature, Giesberg pointed out, was its preoccupation with urban women. Rural women often faced poverty of sudden and emergency proportions when men left for war, and poor women wandered the countryside seeking the rough almshouse charities of the nineteenth-century free labor economy. She reminded readers of the horrendous explosion and fire at the Allegheny Arsenal near Pittsburgh that occurred on the day of the much more famous Battle of Antietam, September 17, 1862. Seventy-eight people died in it, the majority poor working women who made cartridges—their work being rushed particularly at that time because of Robert E. Lee’s invasion of the North. Giesberg seems unconvinced by the essential Republican assertion that the greatest threat to the well-being of people in the North, includ-

⁴⁶ Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009), 47–57.

⁴⁷ Giesberg used the term “naïve” to describe the view of patriotism that depicted Northern women as stoically standing “weeping at every cottage door” as “sturdy farmer boys” marched off to save the nation. *Ibid.*, 8.

ing poor women, was the existence of slavery in the South (rather than capitalism in the North).⁴⁸

She also focused attention on the Philadelphia campaign, waged by African American women in that city, to end segregation on public streetcars; the women often rode the cars seeking to reach places like churches for charitable war work or to visit African American soldiers in camp.⁴⁹ In a particularly ingenious section of the book, Giesberg points out the poor women's conception of military service as a period not terminated by discharge or the death of the soldier but including proper attention to the remains of soldiers killed in battle. Governor Andrew Curtin, the soldiers' friend, proved also to be the friend of the soldiers' families, providing a state program in 1865 to reimburse soldiers' families' expenses incurred in retrieving and interring the bodies at home.⁵⁰ In the end, she suggests a class split among Northern women on the war, with lower-class women less supportive and even taking on the role of dissenters.⁵¹

* * *

If we need another reminder besides the work of Matthew Gallman that the war was not a total war and not totally absorbing, the Keystone State provides probably the most startling single proof: the oil boom. The traditional economic pattern of boom and bust, the familiar "gold rush" quality of resource discovery, and the continuing proof that America was a country more than anything else preoccupied with get-rich-quick schemes from the Jamestown settlement of the early seventeenth century in Virginia on, were manifest as soon as Edwin Drake struck oil in northwest Pennsylvania. Again, Pennsylvania is particularly well served in this area of history by the groundbreaking environmental history written by Brian Black: *Petrolia: The Landscape of America's First Oil Boom*, published in 2000.

In this instance we can see the continuity of greed in American history—from the discovery of oil in 1859 through the Civil War and into the Reconstruction period, many men sought wealth largely oblivious to war and national politics. The national political affairs that interest historians

⁴⁸ Ibid., 58, 68–69.

⁴⁹ These seem to have formed a national pattern, beginning with efforts to open streetcars in San Francisco in 1863. See *ibid.*, 92, 98, and, on Philadelphia, 105–10.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 150–52.

⁵¹ Ibid., 141.

of the period today must have seemed remote from the concerns of the men searching for oil near Titusville, Pennsylvania. In those days war machines were not driven by petroleum fuels, there was no way to dress this quest up as part of the great patriotic effort, and the search was really only a distraction from the nation's battlefield ordeals. The oil sought so avidly was used mainly to replace whale oil as fuel for illumination in the home.

Despite all the oil that flowed in the region, the oil exploration area was a dark place. Fire was such a danger that illumination was allowed only indoors, and smoking was prohibited by law. The boom followed the usual pattern of male population influx, though the imbalance of sexes did not remain great for long. The sudden increase in population in the area was disproportionately made up of new immigrants, especially from Ireland. Perhaps because they remained British subjects, they seem not to have been troubled by conscription and the provost marshals.⁵² Incidentally, Venango County was the heart of the oil boom, and in terms of political persuasion, it remained Republican despite the radical change in composition of the population. It was a close matter, though, and the Republican percentage of the vote in the county fell from about 58 percent to about 53.5 percent between 1860 and 1864.⁵³

The most famous boomtown phenomenon of the Pennsylvania oil rush was the town given the suitably dismal name of Pithole, which grew from zero population to fifteen thousand in eight months in 1865. Events in the Civil War played a critical role in its history:

Pithole's first well had been struck and, truly, timing was everything. Similar strikes had been made in the Oil Creek valley during the first five years of the oil boom, and boomtowns took shape around them in order to provide the goods and services that would be needed. However, during the early months of 1865, thousands of soldiers were discharged from the Union Army. These men flocked to the most likely source of jobs. As if staged as an act in a play, Pithole burst onto the scene and represented the

⁵² Brian Black, *Petrolia: The Landscape of America's First Oil Boom* (Baltimore, 2000), 53, 84, 113–16.

⁵³ Computation based on figures in *The Tribune Almanac and Political Register for 1865* (New York, 1865), 54. It is impossible to compute turnout, but voting numbers increased greatly between 1860 and 1864, in keeping with the trend of the total population of the county, and it would seem that the people who immigrated to exploit the oil boom did not lose their characteristically American interest in politics.

greatest possibilities available in the entire nation. Pithole was suddenly poised to boom as no town ever had.⁵⁴

Yet Pithole died a quick death. By the 1870 census, Pithole had only 281 inhabitants. Community spirit was so weak that it could not sustain a volunteer fire company after 1866, and fires ravaged the town to oblivion.⁵⁵

It is important to have such a reminder of the preoccupations of people in the United States other than civil war in the 1860s. Had petroleum enjoyed the potential to alleviate the national debt that it does today, President Lincoln may have looked to Pennsylvania's boom in thinking about the postwar state of the nation, but in those days gold and silver were the sovereign remedies to national debt, and he looked to the mining towns of the West instead to solve the nation's financial problems.⁵⁶ Lincoln, of course, had knowledge of the California gold rush of the pre-war period, and he was seemingly oblivious to the liabilities of the boom-town phenomenon perceived today. The lure of natural resource exploitation was great in wartime and out, and Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, was not exempt. He helped found the Dramatic Oil Company to dig a well south of Franklin, Pennsylvania, and he owned an interest in the Pithole Creek Company in 1864. He realized nothing from the ventures, but he lied about them, claiming to have gotten rich, and the lure of that imaginary wealth drew conspirators to his assassination plot.⁵⁷

* * *

In most ways, the political history of Pennsylvania during the Civil War era was typical, but it nevertheless stands out because of the peculiarities of the election calendar in the mid-nineteenth century. Pennsylvania's gubernatorial election during the Civil War came in 1863, not in tandem with national elections in 1862 or 1864 (the state's 1790 constitution gave the governor a three-year term). And even its national election in 1864 was peculiar, because Pennsylvania was among the states holding their state elections in October, even when the November presidential election

⁵⁴ Black, *Petrolia*, 150.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 167–69.

⁵⁶ Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, eds., *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln* (Stanford, CA, 1996), 113–14. See Gabor S. Boritt, *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (1978; Champaign, IL, 1994), 226.

⁵⁷ Michael W. Kauffman, *American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies* (New York, 2004), 127–28, 136.

came one month later in the same year. The results of October elections in presidential election years were widely regarded as bellwethers for the November contest, and parties worked especially hard to gain momentum in them. In Pennsylvania, which had a very large population and consequently a large electoral vote, presidential campaigns were lengthy, peculiarly intense, and well funded, and the gubernatorial election was in part a warm-up for the presidential contest a year later. Had it not been for the fact that Ohio also held a gubernatorial election in 1863 and that its Democrats chose as their candidate Clement L. Vallandigham, the leader of the Democratic Party's peace wing and a man of notorious reputation among Republicans, Pennsylvania's politics would have burned even brighter in the imaginations and calculations of the country's politicians.

The 1863 gubernatorial election in Pennsylvania was nonetheless important. Michael Holt helped recover its significance, revealing another of the major problems in interpreting the Civil War. Writing an essay on the historiography of politics during the Civil War, Holt noted that "strident antiwar Democrats such as Ohio's Clement L. Vallandigham, Pennsylvania's George Woodward, and Connecticut's Thomas Seymour. . . all . . . captured Democratic gubernatorial nominations in 1863." He suggested that "only a misreading" of the triumphs of the Democratic Party in the autumn elections in 1862 "rather like the modern Republican misinterpretation of the 1994 congressional elections—allowed Peace Democrats to surge to temporary prominence in the party in 1863."⁵⁸ Holt thus explains the curious and mistaken origins of the peace movement within Pennsylvania's Democratic Party in 1862–63, but not its even more curious persistence. Surely any politician could find the lesson in the results of the 1863 elections. Republicans triumphed over the Democrats in the Pennsylvania gubernatorial race with 51.5 percent of the vote, and in the much-watched Ohio race, Vallandigham lost with only 39 percent of the vote.⁵⁹ The peace wing of the party remained strong despite winning nowhere in 1863. There was a mighty imperative to close ranks, forget ideology, and defeat an incumbent president who was still having trouble winning the war, but peace Democrats proved reluctant and slow to do so.

⁵⁸ Michael F. Holt, "An Elusive Synthesis: Northern Politics during the Civil War," in *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand*, ed. James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper Jr. (Columbia, SC, 1998), 123–24.

⁵⁹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, 1988), 688.

Recent work on Pennsylvania's wartime politics reveals the intensity of partisan divisions, if as yet historians have not exactly offered a satisfying explanation for it. The Civil War history of Pennsylvania stands as proof that the Copperhead movement, though commonly associated with the states of the Old Northwest, was in fact nationwide in extent. Historians have known that for a long time, and historian Arnold Shankman's *The Pennsylvania Antiwar Movement, 1861–1865*, which appeared in 1980, played an important role in bringing that awareness about. "I argue," said Shankman, "that opposition to the war in the Keystone State was as intense as it was in Ohio, Illinois, or New York, states traditionally associated with peace sentiment."⁶⁰

Unfortunately Shankman found it difficult to describe the exact sources and extent of peace sentiment within the Democratic Party. It was never made clear in the book why some Democrats made dispiriting and even dangerous declarations for peace and why some supported the war. In Congress, there is a sure measure of antiwar sentiment: whether the member of Congress votes supplies for the troops or not. But on the hustings, there is no such acid test. What can be said is that Shankman documented a startling strain of intensely bitter sentiment expressed against the Republican administration's war. Like most of the modern insights on Pennsylvania's history in the Civil War era, Shankman's began with the recognition of race prejudice in the North. "Sentiment against free Negroes," he pointed out, "was quite unconcealed throughout the state."

Citizens from all corners of the commonwealth petitioned the legislature to prohibit the future immigration of free blacks into Pennsylvania. Anti-black riots erupted in Philadelphia in 1834, 1848 [*sic*], 1842, and 1849; and Afro-American residents had good reason to doubt that they lived in the city of brotherly love. In Pittsburgh blacks were second-class citizens, and Republican politicians were less likely to complain about the evils of slavery than about the disproportionate power Southerners wielded in national affairs. Under the 1838 Pennsylvania Constitution Afro-Americans had been disfranchised and declared ineligible for citizenship, but some whites continued to call upon the legislature to deprive the blacks of their few remaining civil rights.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Arnold M. Shankman, *The Pennsylvania Antiwar Movement, 1861–1865* (Rutherford, NJ, 1980), 13

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

From the secession crisis of 1860–61 through the reelection of Abraham Lincoln as president in 1864, Pennsylvania Democrats offered startlingly radical proposals. Shankman documented these well. William B. Reed, a prominent Philadelphian and former Buchanan appointee, drafted a resolution at a public rally stating that the dissolution of the Union by Southern secession “may release this Commonwealth from the bonds” connecting it to the Union and “would authorize and require her citizens through a Convention to be assembled for that purpose, to determine with whom her lot should be cast.”⁶² Shankman uncovered the response to secession of Charles R. Buckalew, who would become one of the state’s senators in 1863. Buckalew proposed in a private letter written early in 1861 that the person “who received the second highest number of electoral votes in a presidential election become president of the Senate and be allowed to exercise the veto power. Under this system, he argued, minority rights would be protected, secession would be prevented, and extreme sectionalism would be averted.”⁶³ Pennsylvania would be represented during the war by conservative senators, Buckalew and Edgar Cowan, perhaps the most conservative Republican in the Senate. In another striking case, after John C. Breckinridge, the nominee of the Southern Democrats, lost to Lincoln in 1860, Philadelphian George McHenry departed for Europe and wrote pamphlet propaganda for the Confederacy, such as *Why Pennsylvania Should Become One of the Confederate States of America*, published in London in 1862.⁶⁴

Such material was dramatic, but Shankman’s view was that “Copperhead” was “an appropriate term for the loyal opposition to the Lincoln administration. I consciously join the ranks of those revisionist historians who reject ‘the traditional stereotype of the Copperhead as traitor.’”⁶⁵ Imprecise meanings for such terms as “Copperhead,” which was, after all, an epithet and not a self-conscious and self-proclaimed name of a faction, along with largely unsubstantiated guesses at the extent of support of various factions in the party, were problems in the book. Shankman accumulated numerous anecdotes documenting statements of opposition to the administration and to the war, but he attempted no systematic analysis of the party system. The accumulation was impressive, but it was difficult to describe the sincerity, extent, or purpose of the peace

⁶² *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 67–68.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

sentiments expressed. Like the Democrats of the time, Shankman mistook for “war weariness” on the part of Pennsylvanians a political sentiment that was only *defeat* weariness.⁶⁶

Shankman essentially depicted peace sentiment as a crescendo during the war. He concluded, after an engrossing parade of anecdotes of sharp conflict, bitterly worded sentiments, and arbitrary arrests:

What then was the importance of Pennsylvania Copperheadism? It is true that some wanted an armistice or a military stalemate, but they wanted it because they believed that cessation of hostilities would facilitate the reunion of the two warring sections under “the Constitution as it is and the Union as it was.” At a time when men were prone to disregard civil liberties and castigate all dissenters as traitors, Pennsylvania Copperheads stood up and reminded the nation that the Constitution applied both in time of war and in time of peace. For their actions they suffered personal attacks, imprisonment, loss of friends, and the failure of business; but had they acquiesced in the violations of constitutional rights, a very dangerous precedent would have been established.

They were not, Shankman said, “unpatriotic draft dodgers or treasonable fanatics.”⁶⁷

Shankman admitted that it was “not easy to pinpoint centers of Copperhead strength” in the state, but that is one thing that historian Robert M. Sandow set out to do—give extreme opposition sentiment in Pennsylvania social and geographical roots. His book, *Deserter Country: Civil War Opposition in the Pennsylvania Appalachians*, published in 2009, brings together the history of logging and the startling pattern of opposition politics that emerged from the economic life of rural central Pennsylvania.⁶⁸ A careful student of nationalism, Sandow attempted to solve the problem of the peace wing of the Democratic Party by assuming that there were contesting views of the nation, not that the Republicans wanted to save the nation and that the peace Democrats did not care about the nation. Moreover, he thought that extreme Democratic opposition to the war must have had roots in society. He looked away from cities and draft riots and examined the rural areas of farming and logging.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁶⁸ Shankman could tell from mapping the steadily Democratic areas of voting that some thirty counties “mainly in northeastern, central, and southern Pennsylvania” were likely sources of the sentiments. *Ibid.*, 16–17.

Antebellum farmers in the mountains of Pennsylvania faced the challenge of industrial logging. For generations, small farmers in this poor agricultural region supported their families by cutting timber and floating large-scale rafts to markets. In the 1850s, many mountain farmers felt their livelihoods threatened by new methods of industrial logging. Armies of lumberjacks cut down the great trees and tumbled the logs into the rivers. Choked with floating logs, the rivers of Pennsylvania no longer supported rafting. They perceived state Republican leaders as behind these dramatic changes, urging on the accelerated exploitation of the forests. The thousands of raftsmen that once plied the inland waterways dwindled steadily under the expansion of industrial logging but they did not go quietly. After repeated failures to share the river, rafting lumbermen fought back. When appeals to the legislature met deaf ears, locals took up rifles and axes to redress grievance through vigilantism. A brief raftsmen's rebellion in the late 1850s represented a pattern of protest that area residents repeated during the war. . . . This underlying economic battle caused anti-Republican bitterness to simmer beneath the surface.⁶⁹

During the war, however, to oppose the Republicans was to oppose the party that was running the great Civil War. Sandow concluded, "For many northerners . . . opposing the Lincoln government and its war measures did not violate their sense of nationalism."⁷⁰

The area of rural Pennsylvania that Sandow studied included part of the oil boom region that Brian Black so vividly described, and Sandow noted that the men who built the boom were, essentially, exempt from typical national feeling:

Industrial exploitation of the region's coal, oil, and wood also attracted migrant wageworkers facing their own economic concerns. Coal patches, lumber camps, and the boomtowns of the oil region were chaotic landscapes devoted to extracting the rich natural resources of Pennsylvania. They drew roving young men, willing to work difficult jobs in the hopes of someday getting ahead. Their labor accommodated a certain anonymity and mobility that left little record of their efforts. When called upon to serve in the war, they effortlessly melted away. In their case, a lack of community ties freed them from the peer pressures to uphold civic duties. Cut loose from community, they were free to pursue economic self-interest.

⁶⁹ Robert M. Sandow, *Deserter Country: Civil War Opposition in the Pennsylvania Appalachians* (New York, 2009), 8–9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

While wartime inflation outpaced the rise in wages, it was easy to find steady work at higher pay than before the war. Army wages were pitifully low and accompanied by the real possibility of death. In comparison, few were willing to miss the opportunity for good-paying jobs. Employers encouraged this practice by protecting them from the watchful eyes of the provost marshals.⁷¹

Indeed, Brian Black had been at pains to show that these boomtowns were not really communities at all.

The problem of the peace wing of the Democratic Party remains one of the great unsolved questions of Civil War history—in Pennsylvania and elsewhere. Though we do not know exactly how large it was as a percentage of the party's leaders or voters, it was large considering the powerful national sentiment, a common denominator of the age. The desire to win the presidential election—a driving factor for the leaders of the party—should have dictated a strategy recognized by many Democrats of saying very little about issues until the election was over and simply uniting to win the presidential sweepstakes—running the sort of “hurrah” campaign in 1864 that the Republicans had run in 1860. But at the national nominating convention in 1864, the peace wing held to its principles and put a politically crippling “peace plank” in the platform.

Another book that focuses outside the cities and examines closely the social sources of political conflict during the war is Grace Palladino's *Another Civil War: Labor, Capital, and the State in the Anthracite Regions of Pennsylvania, 1840–68*, published in 1990. Palladino argued that the allegedly antiwar movement Shankman discovered was, in its most dramatic guise of draft resistance and violence directed at conscription officers, an agricultural phenomenon that should not be associated with the coalfields. Draft resistance there, she said, took the form of individual evasion, and the violence was mostly the figment of Republican imaginations enflamed by the sight of labor organization. Demand for coal rose during the Civil War—to power the blockading fleet and to fuel iron production—and the mine operators saw a chance for profit in a previously unstable industry. Unfortunately for the owners, the workers saw their chance to organize and strike to improve their poor wages and sometimes dangerous working conditions. The conflict was worsened by ethnic suspicion or hatred of the coal miners, many of whom were Irish

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

immigrants. The problem was not draft resistance but strikes.⁷²

The owners and the Republican politicians came up with the solution to their problem. "On August 20, 1863," Palladino wrote ominously, "the Department of the Susquehanna, a division of the United States Army, established the Lehigh District, a separate military department to maintain law and order in the coal regions. Headquartered first in Reading, then successively in Pottsville, Scranton, and Mauch Chunk, this military district included Schuylkill, Luzerne, and Carbon Counties, as well as Berks, Lehigh, Northampton, and Monroe." In other words, they found a military solution to a labor problem, and Palladino argued that it looked forward to 1877 and the era of military confrontation with labor in the Gilded Age.⁷³

She depicted the culprits vividly. One was Benjamin Bannan, former coal mine operator and editor of the *Miner's Journal*.

Although labor combinations were rarely welcomed in the coal regions, no matter what ethnic group was involved, no critic proved so harsh as Benjamin Bannan in condemning their emergence. To Bannan, who had lost money as an independent operator in Schuylkill County, there was little difference between organized labor and organized crime or between a strike and a riot. Although his was a most parochial and often paranoid view, nevertheless, Bannan's opinions had greater significance than those of other critics. The *Miner's Journal*, one of the few newspapers of its day to collect and publish industry statistics, served as the operators' trade paper, thus allowing Benjamin Bannan to influence a far wider audience than his local clientele.⁷⁴

Another culprit was Charlemagne Tower, the provost marshal of Schuylkill County and the man in charge of enforcing conscription in the region. He was "skilled and sophisticated in his use of federal power." Unlike other officials Tower was not "frightened and insecure in the face of opposition." He "almost relished the idea of a showdown so that he might demonstrate once and for all the meaning of nationalism in a time of war."⁷⁵ In other words, ostensible conflicts over the war were in fact

⁷² Grace Palladino, *Another Civil War: Labor, Capital, and the State in the Anthracite Regions of Pennsylvania, 1840–68* (Champaign, IL, 1990), 5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 13, 143.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 108–9.

matters of “class conflict.”⁷⁶ Military arrests kept control of the mines in the hands of the owners as the provost marshals “employed the police power of the state to undermine labor organization in the coal regions.”⁷⁷

* * *

This essay does not deal with Pennsylvania’s military history during the war, but an examination of the intersection of civil society with the army underlines the points made so far about the extremes of political conflict and divisiveness within the state. In fact, the questions raised about Pennsylvania’s soldiers proved to be so divisive that they were downright dangerous.

Jonathan W. White attempted to explain the ideology and political content of the Democratic Party in Pennsylvania during the war, though he did not seek explanations of the social makeup of the party. His article “Citizens and Soldiers: Party Competition and the Debate in Pennsylvania over Permitting Soldiers to Vote, 1861–64” describes in careful detail the bitter disputes over absentee voting by soldiers. Pennsylvania was one of only two states at the beginning of the war that allowed its soldiers to vote away from home. Before the war was over, Republicans would see to it that the soldiers in most other states were not disfranchised by service. Pennsylvania might have avoided a conflict over the franchise had it not been for the aggressive state supreme court, for most of the war dominated by Democrats. In May 1862 Justice George W. Woodward, a Democrat soon to become the party’s nominee for governor, made a good case in ruling unconstitutional the old voting law that allowed absentee voting.⁷⁸

Republicans in response launched a campaign to change the state constitution to allow soldiers to vote. Democratic opposition, which was awkward, mounted only slowly, but the Republicans, having reason to

⁷⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 158.

⁷⁸ Jonathan W. White, “Citizens and Soldiers: Party Competition and the Debate in Pennsylvania over Permitting Soldiers to Vote, 1861–64,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 5 (summer 2004): 54. The Supreme Court would strike against the Republicans again in the autumn of 1863, ruling the United States conscription unconstitutional in a procedurally and ideologically controversial opinion—which was quickly reversed when a Republican was elected to the court and changed the party balance. See Mark E. Neely Jr., “Justice Embattled: The Lincoln Administration and the Constitutional Controversy over Conscription in 1863,” in *The Supreme Court and the Civil War*, ed. Jennifer M. Lowe (Washington, DC, 1996), 47–61 (a special edition of the *Journal of Supreme Court History*).

believe that the vote would go their way, were soon bent on going through the complicated process of amending the state constitution in time for Pennsylvania's soldiers to vote in the field in the presidential election of 1864. The amendment passed in a popular vote by the resounding margin of 199,855 to 105,352; it took the legislature ten pages of fine print to write a law implementing the measure in the field.⁷⁹ The soldier vote from Pennsylvania went overwhelmingly to the Republicans. White concluded that the Democrats' opposition was motivated not only by partisanship but also by "old republican ideals—ideas that pervaded Democratic thought in the mid-nineteenth century. These ideas could be traced back to the American Revolution and even the Commonwealth Tradition of the mid-seventeenth-century English Civil War."⁸⁰

Such ideas had once been revolutionary, of course, and the involvement of soldiers with political life in the state proved dangerous. In his essay "A Viler Enemy in Our Rear': Pennsylvania's Soldiers Confront the North's Antiwar Movement," Timothy J. Orr examined a series of political resolutions voted on by Pennsylvania regiments in the field in early 1863—in an astonishing display of military pressure on politics—and concluded:

Given that Union soldiers possessed the physical means to quell dissent—with the muzzles of their rifles or the points of their bayonets—soldiers' public outcries against the antiwar movement were especially ominous. One could hardly imagine Pennsylvania's 30,000 soldiers serving in 1863 returning to Philadelphia or Pittsburgh to inaugurate martial law shortly before the beginning of the Chancellorsville Campaign, yet this is what their unit resolutions suggested.⁸¹

Orr linked the drastic political resolutions to frustration at being denied the franchise:

Unable to vote themselves, soldiers used these resolutions to express themselves politically. When taken as a whole, the resolutions from Pennsylvania regiments suggest a frightening dimension in Northern civil-military relations during the Civil War. Many hinted at legitimating violence toward a treasonous civilian population, which makes the Civil

⁷⁹ White, "Citizens and Soldiers," 60.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸¹ Timothy J. Orr, "A Viler Enemy in Our Rear': Pennsylvania's Soldiers Confront the North's Antiwar Movement," in *The View from the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers*, ed. Aaron Sheehan-Dean (Lexington, KY, 2007), 173–74.

War unique in American military history. In no other case has the American military collectively voiced such an angry and malevolent response aimed at quelling antiwar dissent on the home front.⁸²

Changes in interpreting the Civil War experience in Pennsylvania have gone about as far as they could away from old assumptions about an alleged fifth-column movement in the North. As Shankman and Sandow argued, the Democrats likely constituted a loyal opposition and not a disloyal one, but Republican disgust and fear of their edgy antiwar rhetoric may have caused the Union army itself to constitute a threat to the republic and to republican government.

* * *

It is clear from this review that the “sour note” sounded by William Dusinger back in 1965 has set the tone for writing on the Civil War in Pennsylvania. Triumphalism is nowhere present in the writing. It has been replaced by depictions of political and class conflict, by racism and nativism, by desertion and draft dodging, by anxiety over the market economy instead of confident individualism, by desperately poor dissenting women at home, and by glimpses of near treason. The villains, if we may call them that, are memorable—Francis W. Hughes, Joe Barker, Charlemagne Tower, Benjamin Bannan—even President James Buchanan; there are few inspiring figures. Historians are not fully in agreement on the causes of the Civil War or the sources of bitter partisanship, but they do come together to paint a generally dark canvass of historical events in Pennsylvania during the Civil War era, though Matthew Gallman offers a significant exception.

The accumulated effect of such writing can be viewed in the chapter on the Civil War in the landmark multiauthor text, *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth*, published in 2002. The chapter “Civil Wars, 1850–1900” is conspicuous for its theme of conflict. “The kinds of internal civil wars that marked Pennsylvania in the 1850s—involving class, ethnic, and political differences—persisted during the nation’s great ordeal of the War between the States,” contributor Walter Licht states. The conflict continued for years after the war, we are told, and the legacy of the dominant Republican Party, even by the beginning of the twentieth century in Pennsylvania, was “the bygone politics of national

⁸² *Ibid.*, 189.

and internal civil wars.”⁸³

After immersion in the language of the recent literature on the Civil War in Pennsylvania it is stunning to read what was written on the subject about a hundred years ago. For example, Frank H. Taylor’s *Philadelphia in the Civil War, 1861–1865*, published in 1913, constituted almost a monument to the glory of the Civil War effort.⁸⁴ The book was funded by part of an appropriation of one hundred thousand dollars to erect a soldiers and sailors monument in the city. Ten thousand dollars of that fund went for publishing ten thousand copies of the book. The text was introduced by an excerpt from an address by Colonel William McMichael, given in 1882:

So the Union volunteers of the great American war came, in proud array, along the flag-draped corridors of our national history, passed on to their mission, consecrated to the cause of national integrity. Whatever may now be told of their heroism and triumph can be but an echo of the music which led them on; which stirred the souls of all loyal and patriotic men and women of that far-gone time.

Taylor’s own language and descriptions of sentiment in the city were more restrained, but even he was capable of saying, for example, that the “Union sentiment” that was a product of the 1856 presidential campaign “remained aglow through the following years.”⁸⁵

Today such glowing language attached to the history of the Civil War in Pennsylvania is almost inconceivable. True, the omission of military history from this impressionistic survey of influential modern historical writing on the subject biases our image of the war against any such old-fashioned values and ideas. Still, it is very striking to confront the extreme contrast in sensibility and outlook on the war between Taylor and Dusinger. The roles of historical writing and of public monuments are, of course, different. One cannot help wondering, even so, whether the pendulum might not profitably swing back a little, in this sesquicentennial period, to a less gloomy and chilling view of our state’s past.

Pennsylvania State University

MARK E. NEELY JR.

⁸³ Randall M. Miller and William Pencak, eds., *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth* (University Park, PA, 2002), 216, 255.

⁸⁴ Frank H. Taylor, *Philadelphia in the Civil War, 1861–1865* (Philadelphia, 1913).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4, 11.